

SCANDINAVIAN MYTHOLOGY.

THE

Religion of our Forefathers

BY

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Not Discovered by Columbus," etc , etc.

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Dr.

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NORSE MYTHOLOGY.

By RASMUS B. ANDERSON.

In the forces and phenomena of Nature we must look for the origin of the heathen mythologies. Thus the shepherds found their gods in the bright stars that twinkled every night and seemed to whisper to them of secrets which they could not themselves divine and of powers they did not know. Thus when the Norsemen heard the thunder roll and saw the lightning flash crushing everything in its way, there came to them an image of a mighty god who rode in his chariot athwart the heavens with such din and crash and so fast that his path was wrapped in flames.

The two European mythologies best known to us are the Greek and the Scandinavian. As widely as Greeks differ from the Scandinavians, so widely is Scandinavian mythology different from the Greek. The chief end sought by the Greeks was beauty and harmony. Fostered beneath a clear sky and a sun that never scorches, in a climate where north winds never pierce, the Greek cherished beauty in his soul and fashioned gods and goddesses remarkable for their sweetness and grace. But in the ice-bound regions of the north, where the long arms of the glaciers clutch the valleys in their cold embrace and the death-portending avalanches cut their way down the mountain sides, the people dwelt with a peculiar intensity of feeling upon the tragedy of Nature. From childhood the Norsemen were trained to strife, and thus a race was developed fond of rocking on the stormy seas and of reddening the keen sword-edge in the blood of the foe—and hence their gods became strong and warlike. The old Norsemen cared but little for quiet harmony and beauty. Theirs were the valkyries who rode through the air and hovered over the battlefield to select the heroes who were to fall and be carried to Odin, there to fight again until the world should perish in Ragnarok.

The ancient Scandinavians cannot be said to have possessed any clearly-defined knowledge of a god outside of Nature—that is, of any Supreme God. The highest divinity was Odin, the father of the gods and men, as he is styled. He occupies a position like that of Zeus in the Greek mythology. Still there are passages both in the Eddas and in the Sagas which more or less vaguely point to a god outside of Nature and higher than Odin. In the lay of Hyndla, in the Elder Edda, we find this striking passage:

Then one is born
Greater than all;
He becomes strong
With the strengths of earth:
The mightiest king
Men call him
Fast knit in peace

With all powers.
Then comes another
Yet more mighty;
BUT HIM DARE I NOT
VENTURE TO NAME:
Few further may look
Than to where Odin
To meet the wolf goes.

Odin we know goes to "meet the wolf" (that is, the Fenriswolf), in Ragnarok, in the final conflict between all good and evil powers, and thus the poet has here referred to an unknown or nameless god, just as the Greeks according to Paul had an altar with the inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. It was of this same unknown god that one of the ancient Greek poets had said that in him

we live, and move and have our being. Thus just as the Greeks found in the labyrinth of their heathen deities a god greater than Zeus, so the Supreme God, superior to Odin, stands out, though less distinctly, in the Scandinavian heathen belief.

And in accordance with this statement, we find that this "yet more mighty one" whom the rhapsodist "dare not venture to name" is worshipped by various old and thoughtful men in the pre-Christian age. I will mention a few examples.

It is recorded that Ingemund the Old, a heathen Norseman in Iceland, bleeding and dying, prayed the nameless god to forgive his murderer Rolleif.

Thorkel Maane, a supreme judge of Iceland in the heathen time, a man of unblemished life, and distinguished as a most wise magistrate, declared that he would worship no other god than Him who had created the sun, and in his dying hour he prayed the Father of Light to illuminate his soul in the darkness of death. It is related that when Thorkel Maane had arrived at the age of maturity and reflection he refused a blind obedience to traditional custom, and employed much of his time in weighing the established tenets of his countrymen by the standard of reason. He divested his mind of all prejudice; he pondered on the sublimity of Nature, and guided himself by maxims founded on truth and good sense. By these means he discovered not only the fallacy of the asafaith, but also became a convert to the belief in the existence of a power more mighty than Odin or Thor. In his Creator he recognized his God and to Him alone directed his worship from a conviction that none other was worthy to be honored and adored. On perceiving the approach of his death this pious man asked to be conveyed into the open air in order that, as he said, he might in his last moments contemplate the glories of God who made the earth and the heavens and all that in them is.

One more example will suffice. Harald Fairhair, the first sovereign of Norway, the king who united Norway under his sceptre in the year 872, was accustomed to assist at the public offerings made by the people in honor of their gods. As none other than the Odinic religion was known in that country in his day, he acted with prudence in not betraying either contempt or disregard for the prevailing worship of the land, lest his subjects, stimulated by such example, might become indifferent, not only to their sacred, but also to their political duties. Yet in his heart of hearts he rejected those superstitious ceremonies and believed in the existence of a more powerful divinity, whom he secretly worshipped. "I swear," he once asked, "never to make my offerings to an idol, but to that God alone whose omnipotence has formed the world and stamped man with his own image. It would be an act of folly in me to expect help from him whose power and empire arise from the accidental hollow of a tree or a peculiar form of a stone."

All will agree that every mythology embodies some religious faith. Just as we at the present time seek to find God by philosophical speculation (natural theology), by our emotional nature, by our good deeds, or by all of these at one time, and just as we when we have found Him, rest upon His breast, although we do not fully agree as to our conception of Him, each of us having our own god as each has his own rainbow, so the heathens of old sought God everywhere—in the rocks, in the babbling stream, in the heavy ear of grain, in the star-strewn sky of night, and in the splendor of the sun. To interpret a myth, therefore, is not only to give its source but also its aim, together with the thoughts and feelings it awakened in the human breast.

Many writers have claimed that the Scandinavian mythology is a degradation of and aberration from the Biblical religion. They take the position that there were originally one tongue and one religion. Viewed from this standpoint the two Eddas of Iceland are a sort of Old and New Testament, which have come down to us through vast ages, growing, as traditions do, continually more obscure and accumulating lower matter and more divergent and more

pagan doctrines, as the walls of old castles become covered with mosses and lichens, till they finally assume the form in which they were collected from the lips of the Norseman and put in a permanent written form. Interpreters of this school claim that through all mythologies there run certain great lines which converge toward one common centre and point to an original source of a religious faith which has grown dimmer and more disfigured the further it has gone. They say Central Asia is the geographical centre from which all the systems of heathen belief have proceeded. Upon this theory Loke of the Scandinavians, Pluto of the Greeks, Ahriman of the Persians, Siva of the Hindoos, etc., are all originally the devil of the Bible, who has changed his name and more or less his personal form and characteristics. The Scandinavian Odin, Vile and Ve; Odin, Høner, and Loder; and Odin, Thor, and Balder, are degenerated representatives of the Biblical trinity. There are scholars even at the present day who find in the Scandinavian cosmogony in a somewhat mutilated and interpolated condition the Biblical story of the creation, preservation, destruction and regeneration of this world. Ygdrasil, the wonderful ash-tree of existence, is the tree of life in the Garden of Eden. Ask and Embla, the first human pair, are Adam and Eve; the blood of the slain giant Ymer, in which the whole race of frost giants was drowned, excepting one pair who were saved in a skiff and from whom a new giant race descended, are made to represent the deluge. The citadel called Midgard is the Tower of Babel. In the death of Balder slain by Hoder, who was instigated by Loke, is found the Crucifixion of Christ slain by Judas, who was instigated by the devil. The heaven and the hell so vividly described in the Eddas furnish a large field for comparison with Biblical passages on the same subjects. The trouble with these interpreters is that they attempt to prove too much. It is in our judgment sufficient to say that races which can trace their languages to a common origin have also got their religious system from a common source. We know that Aryan or Indo-European languages converge into one in the dim past, and consequently we assume that the Aryan religions flow from a common original spring. But so long as no scholar has demonstrated that Greek or Norse are originally the same language as Hebrew there is no good reason for assuming that Ask and Embla are merely Norse names for Adam and Eve.

On the other hand, just as we have many Semitic words incorporated in the English tongue, and just as Aryan words have found their way into Hebrew, so Scandinavian mythology has been more or less influenced by Christian ideas after the two systems of the religion met and came in contact with each other. And who denies that the Christian church has borrowed much from the various mythologies of Europe? In the present customs of the European peoples much of the old heathenism is preserved. Nay, we might almost say the whole Odinic mythology still exists, not as a faith and doctrine, but as a form of worship adapted to Christianity. The old great Scandinavian festivals with their various ceremonies have simply been converted into Christian festivals. This is true of Christmas, which the old Norseman called Yule; and is not the Christmas tree a survival of the Ash-tree Ygdrasil? The festivals of Easter, of St. John and of St. Michael are old Scandinavian festivals Christianized. In many instances even the places of worship were retained. Where a heathen divinity had long been worshiped, the Christians built a church and dedicated it to some saint or other, to whom, henceforth, both the worship and the myth were referred and became blended. St. Michael took the place of Odin or Thor, and the Odin or Thor myths were henceforth told of St. Michael. Where there was a tree sacred to Odin, an image of St. Mary was hung up, but in other respects the old form of worship was continued under the protection of the Church. Of course the customs have taken a stronger hold on the Catholic Church, while the protestants have allowed many of them to pass into disuse. What we mean to emphasize is merely the fact that while Scandinavian mythology doubtless borrowed much from the Christian religion, and in turn lent much

to it, the two systems are essentially different, and there is no evidence of a common original source.

As already indicated, Scandinavian mythology **must** look for its fundamental interpretation in physical nature. The divinities are the **forces and phenomena** of nature personified. The works of the gods correspond faithfully to the events and scenes of the outward world. But we must not neglect to apply an ethical or spiritual explanation as well. The spiritual and physical interpretation must be combined. In other words, we must regard the gods as human as possible. The phenomena and forces of Nature were personified by the ancient Scandinavians into deities and the myths were elaborated to suit the moral, intellectual and emotional nature,—the inner life of man. The deities were conceived in human form, with human attributes and affections. The ancient Scandinavians depicted themselves in their gods, and so clothed them with their own faculties of mind and body in respect to good and evil, virtue and vice, right and wrong. Read what the great Norse scholar, Rudolph Keyser, has said on this point:—

“The gods are the ordaining powers of Nature clothed in personality. They direct the world which they created; but beside them stand the mighty goddesses of fate and time, the great norns, who sustain the world structure, the all-embracing tree of the world, that is Ygdrasil. The life of the world is a struggle between the good and the light gods on the one side, and the offspring of chaotic matter, the giants, Nature's disturbing forces on the other. This struggle extends also into man's being: the spirit proceeds from the gods, the body belongs to the world of giants. They struggle with each other for supremacy. If the spirit conquers by virtue and bravery, man goes to heaven after death to fight in concert with the gods against the evil powers; but if the body conquers and links the spirit to itself by weakness and low desires, then man sinks after death to the world of giants in the lower regions, and joins himself with the evil powers in the warfare against the gods.”

Nature is the mother at whose breast we are all nourished. In ancient times she was the object of child-like contemplation and adoration. The contemplation of the heavens produced the myth about Odin, and the thunder-storm suggested Thor, as in the Greek mythology Argus with his hundred eyes represents the star-lit heavens, and the wandering Io whom Hera had set him to watch is the wandering moon. But stopping here would be to prosaic. It would be giving the empty shell and throwing away the kernel. The old Frisians regarded the whole world as a huge ship called *Manigfual*, a counterpart to the Scandinavian ash Ygdrasil. The mountains were its masts. The captain must go from one place to another of his ship to give his orders on horseback. The sailors go aloft as young men to make sail, and when they arrive down again their hair and beard are white. Aye, are we not all sailors on board this great ship, and have we not all enough to do, each in his own way, to climb its ropes and ladders, and make and reef its sails, and do not our hairs turn gray ere we are aware of it? But take the human elements out of these myths, and what is there left of them?

The sources to be examined in regard to Scandinavian mythology are many and varied. Throughout the Scandinavian countries are found monumental stones on which runic inscriptions have been written in heathen times. Of these “Runic Monuments,” no less than three folio volumes have been published by the great and indefatigable scholar and runologist, Professor George Stephens of Copenhagen.

From heathen Germany we have a few ancient laws and a few glossaries containing mythological words. The *Lex Saliica* of which we have a Latin translation was doubtless originally produced in the German tongue. In the time of Chlodovic it was translated into Latin, and here and there words from the original text were inserted parenthetically to guarantee, as it were, the correctness of the version. But in the course of time these words were either

wholly omitted or greatly corrupted by transcribers. Then there are formulæ by which the new converts to Christianity renounced the old gods and in which names of heathen divinities therefor occur. But precious though it be, the amount of mythological information to be gathered from these and similar sources is very small. A richer vein of information is the tolerably well represented collection of German heroic poems, among which the most important are the Niblung story and Gudrun. The Heliand preserves a number of heathen phrases and figures of speech. The Anglo-Saxon Beowulf poem would be more valuable had not the Christian transcriber conceived it to be his duty to omit the names of the heathen gods occurring in the lay.

Iceland, that wonderful island of the cold and boisterous North Sea, is the Mecca, to which all they must turn who would understand the Odinic religion. Iceland is the Patmos where the Apocalypse of the Teutonic race was recorded. Here we find the well of Miner and the fountain of Urd. In Icelandic we find a whole library of mythological literature, put in writing after the introduction of Christianity (A. D., 1000), and after the people had adopted the Roman alphabet, but still written in the spirit of the *asa-faith*, "naught extenuating and putting down naught in malice." The most important of the Icelandic documents are the Elder and the Younger Edda. The former is a collection of mythic and heroic poems, undoubtedly fragments of the songs that were preserved in the schools of the priests of heathendom. And here it is proper to suggest that the Celts described by Cæsar in his *Commentaries on the Gallic War* were not of the same race as the present Irish, Welsh, etc., but a Teutonic tribe. The present inhabitants of Bretagne are not descendants of the ancient Gauls, but are immigrants into France from Great Britain. Cæsar gives us a glimpse of the manner in which mythological songs and epics were preserved in ancient times in his description of the Druids. He tells us that the literature in their keeping was so extensive that it required twenty years to commit it to memory! This militates against the theory that the Eddic poems were folk-songs, that is, ballads known by the whole people. That interesting passage in Cæsar describing the Druids opens to us a world of information. It gives us in a few striking sentences the key to the mystery in regard to the preservation in oral form, through many centuries, of the Vedas, the Iliad and Odyssey, the Niblung story, Beowulf, etc. and the Elder Edda. How and when the Elder Edda was recorded with Roman characters is a subordinate question. Whether it was gathered from the lips of persons who yet remembered fragments of the Druidic songs of the North and put into a skin-book by the priest Sæmund Sigfusson, who died in the year 1133, or by some other Icclander, is an interesting but not important question. Even so great a scholar as the Swede Erik Gustaf Geijer contends that the Elder Edda existed in Runic before it appeared in Roman characters. Scarcely less important is the younger Edda, said to be written by Snorre Sturlason, the great author of *Heimskringla*, who died in 1241. This work gives in prose form, with here and there a poetic quotation, a succinct account of the Odinic religion from the creation to the destruction and regeneration of the world. Some of the stanzas quoted are not recorded in the Elder Edda.

The *Heimskringla*, completed by Snorre Sturlason about the year 1230, contains a vast amount of information about Scandinavian heathendom, for it gives an elaborate account of the introduction of Christianity in Norway, portraying the conflict between the old and the new religion, and begins with sketches of a number of kings, who ruled Norway one hundred and forty years before the introduction of Christianity. Hence valuable information may be found in that work not only of the rites and ceremonies prescribed by the Odinic ritual, but also of the morals and habits inculcated and produced by the Odinic code. Several Icelandic sagas are also of value in this respect.

The value of Cæsar has been indicated. With him ranks Tacitus. In the other Roman and Greek writers there is but little to be gleaned in regard to

Teutonic mythology. Next after Cæsar and Tacitus come the Christian writers down through the foggy and dark Middle ages, who, instead of writing in German or English (Anglo-Saxon) or other vernaculars, took to scribbling in Latin; but the very small account of mythological information contained in their books, is due in part to their ignorance but mainly to their hostility to the heathen religion. Among this class of writers the North presents a remarkable exception in Saxo Grammaticus, who lived in Denmark in the 12th century. He wrote a *Historia Danica* and embodied in it an outline of Scandinavian mythology based on old songs. But he presents it as history, assuming Odin, Thor and the other deities to have been kings and potentates in the North. The first eight books of his history are exclusively mythological. He has had a world of valuable light, though he himself saw nothing.

Finally the student of Scandinavian mythology must look for fragments of Odinism in the customs, habits, speech, traditions, ballads, folk-lore tales, and in the usages of the Christian Churches throughout Teutondom. The folk-lore tales are especially valuable, and during the last half century they have found splendid collectors in Germany (the brothers Grimm) in Norway (Asbjornsen and Moe), and in Iceland (Jon Arnason). These stories like many of the ballads are myths, in which the names of the gods have been changed or suppressed. The ballad and folk-lore tale are the resurrection of the buried myths.

Scandinavian mythology is too vast a subject to be exhaustively treated in so brief an article as this. We shall simply give a brief synopsis condensed as it were under hydraulic pressure, and for further information on the subject we take the liberty of referring the reader to our more comprehensive work entitled "Norse Mythology," published by S. C. Griggs & Co., Chicago, and by the Trubners, in London.

"It was time's morning
When Ymer lived;
There was no sand, no sea,
Nor cooling billows;
Earth there was none,
No lofty heaven;
No spot of living green;
Only a deep profound."

Thus the Elder Edda. The beginning was this: Many ages ere the earth was made, there existed two worlds. Far to the north was Nifheim (the nebulous world) and far to the south was Muspelheim (the fire world). Between them was Ginungagap (the yawning gap). In the middle of Nifheim lay the spring Hvergelmer and from it flowed twelve ice-cold streams called the Elivogs, of which Gjøl was situated nearest Hel's Gate. Muspelheim was so bright and hot that it burned and blazed, and could not be entered by those who did not have thier home there. In the midst of this intense light and burning heat sat SURT guarding its borders with a flaming sword in his hand. The Elivog rivers flowed far from their spring-head in Hvergelmer into Ginungagap and the venom they carried with them hardened, as does the dross from a furnace, and became ice. Vapors gathered and froze to rime and thus were formed in the yawning gap many layers of congealed vapor. But the south side of the abyss was lighted up by sparks from Muspelheim. Thus while freezing cold and gathering gloom proceeded from Nifheim, the other side of the gulf was exposed to the dazzling radiance and scorching blasts of Muspelheim, and when the heated blasts met the frozen vapor it melted into drops, and by the might of him who sent the heat, these drops quickened into life and took the form of a giant man. His name was Ymer and he became the progenitor of all the race of giants. At the same time and in the same manner sprang into life a cow, Audhumbla, by whose milk Ymer was nourished. The cow fed herself by licking the salt rime on the rocks, and at the end of the first day she produced by her licking the stones a man's hair, on the second evening a head, and on the third evening a perfect man. His name was Bure. He was fair, great and mighty. He begat a son

by name Bor. Bor married the giantess Bestla, daughter of Bolthorn, and she bore him three sons, Odin, Vile and Ve, and Odin became the father of the gods who rule heaven and earth. The three brothers, Odin, Vile and Ve, slew the giant Ymer, and when he fell so much blood flowed that all the race of giants drowned excepting Bergelmer and his wife, who escaped in a boat (ark) and perpetuated their race. The three sons of Bor dragged Ymer's body into Ginungagap and out of it they made the world; of his flesh the land, of his blood the ocean, of his bones the rocks, of his hair the forests, of his skull the vaulted sky, which they decorated with red hot flakes from Muspelheim to serve as sun, moon and stars. Ymer's brains they scattered in the air and made of them the melancholy clouds. Dwarfs quickened like maggots in Ymer's flesh. But there were yet no human beings. One day, Odin, Høner, and Loder were walking by the sea and found two trees, an ash and an elm. They made of them the first man and woman. Odin gave them life and spirit, Høner endowed them with reason and the power of motion, and Loder gave them blood, hearing, vision and the image of the gods. The man they called Ask and the woman Embla, and from them are descended the whole human family.

The counterparts of this story in Genesis need only to be mentioned. As a proof of the thoroughness, depth, and comprehensiveness of the old Scandinavian mind the reader will note the fact that instead of making the world pass simply from chaos to cosmos, the old Scandinavians took a step further back into primeval time and conceived a *pre-chaotic* state (Muspelheim, Nifheim, and Ginungagap), then a chaotic epoch (Ymer, Audhumbla, Bure, Bor, Bestla, Bolthorn, Odin, Vile, and Ve), and finally cosmos made from the slain Ymer. The gods belonging to the Asgard Pantheon and also the giants came into being in the middle of chaotic epoch. Odin was born in chaos. But the Scandinavian conceived living and life-giving beings in the pre-chaotic age. SURT guarded Muspelheim before any creation or birth had taken place. Is not he the unknown god who is from everlasting to everlasting? SURT is also the last figure who appears in Ragnarok, the destruction of the world. He flings fire and flame over the world and is the last one who appears in that terrible act of the drama. Elsewhere it is stated that Nidhug, a terrible serpent, dwells in Hvergelmer in Nifheim. *Venom* flowed with the Elivog rivers out of Hvergelmer. This points to an evil being in Nifheim, that is *from* everlasting, but after Ragnarok he sinks into the unfathomable abyss never to rise again, and thus he is *not* everlasting. This dualism in the pre-chaotic epoch is a very interesting point in the Scandinavian religion.

The Odinic pantheon has twelve gods to whom Divine worship is due, and there are twenty-six goddesses. The gods dwell in Asgard, but nearly every god has a separate dwelling. Thus Odin's high-seat is Hlidskjalf, whence he looks out upon all the nine worlds. He also has a large hall, the famous Val-hal, whither he invites all men fallen in battle. Thor lives in Thrudvang, Balder in Breidablik, etc. Concerning the different gods, and particularly about Thor, Odin, Balder, and Frey, there are a number of beautiful myths, but it is not within the scope of this article to produce them here.

At once the most poetical and significant, the most lofty, beautiful and impressive myth is that of the great world-tree, the ash Ygdrasil, the very name of which has its boughs laden with thought. It is the tree of existence, the tree of life and knowledge, the tree of grief and fate, the tree of time and space; it is the tree of the universe. This tree has three roots, extending into the three principal worlds. The lowest strikes down into Nifheim, into the well Hvergelmer, where it is gnawed by the ancient dragon Nidhug, and all his reptile brood. The second root stretches into Jotunheim to the fountain of Mimer where wisdom and wit lie hidden, and of whose waters Odin once purchased a draught, leaving one of his eyes as a pledge with Mimer. The third root is found in Asgard among the gods, near the sacred fountain of Urd, the norn of the past, where the gods sit in judgment, riding thither daily over the

Bifrost bridge, that is, the rainbow. At this fountain dwell the three norns, or fates, Urd (the Past), Verdande (the Present), and Skuld, (the Future), and dispense the destinies of men. They do not spin the thread, but weave the web of men's lives. They weave a web of golden thread from East to West, from the radiant dawn to the glowing sunset of man's horizon. The woof of this web is fixed in the dark North, but the web woven by Urd and Verdande is torn into pieces every evening by Skuld. The branches of Ygdrasil spread over the whole world, and aspire above heaven itself. An eagle is perched on the topmost bough, and between his eyes a hawk. A squirrel called Ratatosk runs up and down the tree, seeking to cause strife between the eagle and Nidhug. Four stags leap beneath its branches and feed on its buds. Two swans swim in the Urd fountain, and everything placed therein becomes as white as the film of an egg-shell. The norns draw water from this spring, and with it they sprinkle Ygdrasil in order that the boughs may continue green in spite of the destructive agencies that constantly assail it. Honey-dew falls from Ygdrasil, and is food for the bees. Odin hung nine nights on this tree and offered himself to himself. Ygdrasil is a grand myth and grand things have been said of it by Thomas Carlyle and Karl Blind, to whose descriptions the reader is referred.

It may be worth while to notice in passing the frequent recurrence of the number *three* in the Scandinavian mythology. There were originally *three* worlds, Nifheim, Muspelheim, and Ginungagap; there were *three* stages of development, the pre-chaotic, chaotic and cosmos. *Three* gods, Odin, Vile and Ve, created the world out of Ymer's body. *Three* gods, Odin, Hœner and Loder, created the first human pair. Ygdrasil has *three* roots, stretching into *three* worlds, and these three worlds are each divided into three subdivisions or sub-worlds, that is nine, which is *three* times *three*. There are *three* norns, *three* fountains, Hvergelmer's, Urd's, and Mimer's, and Odin hung *three* times *three* nights on the ash Ygdrasil, and several other recurrences of this sacred number might still be added before the list is complete. In the Bible we have the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, while Odin, Vile and Ve, mean Spirit, Will and Sanctity. Ve will readily be recognized as related to the German Wei in Weihnacht (Christmas).

The development of the evil principle in Scandinavian mythology is scarcely less elaborately treated than in Biblical theology. How the dragon Nidhug and his brood originated in Hvergelmer, that fountain in Nifheim, and the probability that he existed from the time when primeval evolution took its beginning, has already been stated. The giant descendants of Ymer were evil, and they did not all perish in his blood-deluge, for Bergelmer and his household escaped like Noah of old, and like him produced a numerous offspring, with whom Thor and the other gods carried on a constant warfare. But the great type or representation of evil is Loke. He is, indeed, the instigator of all the misfortunes that have happened both to gods and to men. He is of giant race, but was adopted by the gods and was already in the dawn of time a foster brother of Odin. He may not improperly be styled a fallen angel. The countenance of Loke is fair, but his disposition is thoroughly bad. It is an interesting fact that the Scandinavian mythology makes the devil good-looking and attractive instead of ugly-looking and repulsive. Why Christianity should represent the devil as the ugliest looking being, and at the same time ascribe so much influence to him is a mystery, to say the least. Loke frequently accompanies the gods, and they make use of his strength and cunning, but when out of sight he usually plots with the giants for the purpose of bringing ruin upon the gods. He became the father of three terrible children in Jotunheim, that is to say, in the home of the giants. These are (1) the Fenriswolf, (2) the Midgard-serpent, also called Jormundgand, and (3) Hel, the goddess of death. The gods knew that these children of Loke were growing up and would some day cause them great mischief. Therefore they bound the Fenriswolf on a

barren island and put a sword in his open-stretched mouth, but for this the god Tyr had to sacrifice his right hand. They cast the Midgard-serpent into the deep sea, where he encircles the whole earth and bites his own tail. Thor was at one time out fishing with the giant Hymer. He caught the Midgard-serpent on his hook baited with a giant bull's head, and would have slain it with his hammer Mjölner, had it not been for the giant Hymer who got frightened and cut the fishing line just at the moment when Thor had his hammer raised to strike. The third child of Loke, Hel, goddess of death, was thrown into Nifheim, and Odin commanded that all who die of sickness or old age should go to her; while warriors slain in battle were borne on valkyrian arms to Valhal. Hel's dwelling is called Helheim, and is large and terrible. Indeed her realm in the lower world is divided into nine regions one below the other, and it is in the lowest of these that her palace is called Anguish, her table Famine, the waiters Slowness and Delay, the threshold Precipice, and the bed Care. The English word *hell* is, of course, intimately connected with her name.

Loke caused the greatest sorrow to gods and men, when by his cunning he brought about the death of Balder. Balder is the most Christlike character in the Scandinavian mythology, and the account of his death has a strange similarity to that of the crucifixion of Christ. Balder was the favorite of all Nature, of all the gods and of men. He was the son of Odin and Frigg, and the Edda says that it may be truly said of him that he is the best god, and that all mankind are loud in his praise. So fair and dazzling is he in form and features that rays of light seem to issue from him, and we may form some idea of the beauty of his hair when we know that the whitest of all flowers is called Balder's brow. Balder is the mildest, the wisest, and the most eloquent of the gods, yet such is his nature that the judgment he has pronounced can never be altered. He dwells in the heavenly mansion called Breidablik (that is, broad-shining splendor) into which nothing unclean can enter.

Balder was tormented by terrible dreams indicating that his life was in danger. He communicated his dreams to his fellow-gods, who resolved to conjure all things animate and inanimate not to harm him, and accordingly Odin's wife Frigg, took an oath from all things that they would do Balder no harm. But still Odin felt anxious, and saddling his eight-footed horse Sleipner, he rode down to Nifheim, where he waked the vala or seeress, and compelled her to give him information about the fate of Balder. When it had been made known that all things had taken a solemn oath not to hurt Balder, it became a favorite pastime of the gods at their meetings to put him up as a mark and shoot at him. But it sorely vexed Loke to see that Balder was not hurt. So he took on the guise of an old woman, went to Frigg and asked her if all things had promised to spare Balder. From Frigg he learned that on account of its insignificance she had neglected to exact an oath from the mistletoe. So he straightway went and pulled this up, repaired to the place where the gods were assembled, and induced the blind god Hoder to throw the mistletoe at his brother and do him honor as did the other gods. Loke himself guided Hoder's hand. The twig did not miss its shining mark and Balder fell dead. The gods were struck speechless with terror. When they had had time to recover their senses, Frigg sent Hermod to the goddess Hel to ask her to permit Balder to return to Asgard. Hel said she would release Balder if it was true that he was so universally beloved, and this she would test by observing if all things would weep for him. Messengers were despatched throughout all the world to beseech all things to weep Balder out from Hel's domain. And all things did so with alacrity, men, animals, the earth, stones, trees and metals, just as we see things weep when they come out of the frost into the warm air (a beautiful evidence that Balder is the sun or summer). The messengers were returning confident that their mission had been successful, but on their way home they found a hag crouching on the ground. She called herself Thokk, but she was none

else than Loke in disguise. Thokk said she could not weep other than dry tears, and so Hel kept her prey. Now as Loke is physical heat and fire, Thokk's dry tears are the sparks that fly from the burning wood.

Soon afterward Loke was captured and bound with strong cords to the points of rocks in a cavern. A serpent was suspended over him in such a manner that the venom fell into Loke's face drop by drop. But Sigyn, Loke's wife, took pity on him. She stands by him and receives the drops as they fall in a cup, which she empties as often as it is filled. But while she is emptying it, venom falls upon Loke's face, which makes him shriek with horror, and twist his body about so violently that the whole earth quakes, and thus earthquakes are produced. The relation of Loke to the devil, or Satan, in Biblical theology needs not to be pointed out.

But when Balder, the bright and good, had passed from the happy family circle of the gods, to the cold and gloomy abodes of Hel, the awful day of doom was impending. It was a fatal thing for the gods, and for the world, that they united themselves with the giant race. Adam and Eve should not have held intercourse with the wily serpent in the garden of Eden. The Norse gods should not have admitted Loke into Asgard. Christ's and Balder's death was the result, and this hastened the day when the whole world shall be destroyed, when gods and men and giants shall perish in Ragnarok, the twilight of the gods. Increased corruption and strife in the world are the signs that this great and awful event is impending. Continuous winters rage without any intervening summers now that Balder has been slain; the air is filled with violent storms, snow and darkness, and these are the signs that Ragnarok is at hand. The sun and moon are swallowed by giants who pursue them in the guise of wolves, and the heavens are stained with blood. The bright stars vanish, the earth trembles in the throes of the earthquake, and the mountains topple down with a tremendous crash. Then all chains and fetters are severed and the terrible Fenriswolf gets loose. The Midgard-serpent writhes in his giant rage and seeks land upon the tumultuous waves. Is not the reader forcibly reminded of passages in the New Testament, telling of the things that are to happen before the day of judgment? And does not this description suggest the fall of Troy? But what a serpent is this Scandinavian Jormungand, as compared with the two serpents that appeared before the burning of Troy, issuing from the sea, and casting their slimy coils around Laocoon and his two sons, and causing their death! But how much grander throughout, is not this Scandinavian Ragnarok than any other day of judgment ever conceived! The ship Naglfar, which has been built of the nail-parings of dead men, floats upon the waters carrying the army of frost-giants over the sea, and having the mighty giant Hrym as its helmsman. Loke, too, is now freed from his dark cave and strong chains, and comes to the scene, as the leader of the hosts of Hel. The Fenriswolf advances and opens his enormous mouth. His lower jaw rests on the earth, and the upper touches the sky. It is only for want of room that he does not open his mouth still wider. Fire flashes from his mouth and nostrils. The Midgard-serpent placing himself by the side of the Fenriswolf vomits forth floods of venom that fill the air and the waters. In the midst of this confusion, crashing and devastation, the heavens are rent in twain, and the sons of Muspel come riding down through the opening in brilliant battle array.

And now Surt, the same being that sent the heated blasts from Muspelheim into Ginungagap in the pre-chaotic world and by whose might the drops of venom sent by Nidhug in Niflheim quickened into the giant Ymer, he who is from everlasting to everlasting, this "unknown god" appears upon the scene, wrapped in flames of fire. His flaming sword outshines the sun himself. All the hosts here described come riding over the Bifrost bridge, that is the rainbow, which breaks beneath so great a weight. All this vast and glittering army direct their course to the great battle-field called Vigrid, and thus the giants on their part, are ready for the final struggle.

Meanwhile Heimdal, on the part of the gods, blows his Gjallarhorn to arouse the gods, who assemble without delay. In his embarrassment Odin now, for the *third* time in his history, goes to the older race, that is, the giants, to seek advice. He rides to Mimer's fountain, where he in his youth had pawned his eye for knowledge, to consult Mimer as to how he and his warriors are to enter into action. The answer he received is nowhere recorded; but in the meanwhile the great ash Ygdrasil begins to quake and quiver, nor is there anything in heaven or on earth that does not fear and tremble in that awful hour. The gods and all the einherjes (*i. e.*, those fallen in battle and brought to Valhal), don their armor, arm themselves and speedily rally forth to the field of battle, led by Odin, who is easily recognized by his golden helmet, resplendent cuirass, and his flashing spear Gungner. Odin places himself against the Fenriswolf as the foe most worthy of his steel. Thor stands by Odin's side, but can give him no assistance, as he must himself contend with the Midgard-serpent—and well-matched they are. Frey encounters the mighty Surt himself, but though terrible blows are exchanged, Frey falls, and the Edda says he owes his defeat to the fact that he did not have that trusty sword which in his passion for a giantess he gave to his servant Skirner, when he sent him to ask the hand of the charming giantess Gerd. Thus it appears again and again that if the gods had not allowed themselves intercourse with the giants they would not have come to this sad plight. In the last hour the dog Garm, which for ages had been chained in the Gnipacave, also breaks loose. He is the most terrible monster of all, and he attacks the one-handed Tyr, who had sacrificed his right hand in order to get the Fenriswolf bound. Garm and Tyr kill each other. Thor gains great renown by dealing the death-blow to the Midgard-serpent with his mighty hammer Mjolner, but he retreats only nine paces before he, too, falls dead, suffocated by the flood of venom, which the expiring serpent vomits forth upon him. The Fenriswolf, with his enormous and wide-open mouth, swallows Odin, but Vidar, Odin's son, immediately advances to avenge his father. He places his foot upon the wolf's lower jaw, the other he seizes with his hand and thus tears and rends him till he dies. Vidar is able to do this, for he wears a shoe, for which materials have been gathered through all ages. It is made of scraps of leather cut off from the toes and heels in making patterns for shoes. Hence, says the Edda, shoemakers should throw away such pieces, if they desire to render assistance to the gods in the final conflict. Loke and Heimdal meet in duel and become each others' slayers. The conflict is still raging with unabated fury, when Surt, who is immortal, flings fire and flames over the world. Smoke wreathes up around the universal ash-tree Ygdrasil: the high flames play against the lurid heavens and the earth consumed sinks down beneath the watery waste. It is of course possible that this Edda account of Ragnarok contains elements borrowed from Biblical theology, but the fundamental elements are no doubt original, inasmuch as it is in perfect harmony with the Scandinavian system of mythology taken as a whole.

After Ragnarok comes a new world. The earth rises a second time from the sea, and is completely clothed in green. Sparkling cascades fall, overarched by rainbows glistening in the sunbeams. The eagle soars on lofty pinion in pursuit of his prey. The gods risen from the dead assemble on the Ida plains and talk about the strange things that have happened in the past, about the Fenriswolf, about the Midgard-serpent, about Loke, and about the ancient runes of the mighty Odin. The fields unsown yield their bountiful harvests, all ills cease and the gods live in peace. A new sun, brighter and more resplendent than the former one, appears, and there is naught but beauty, plenty and happiness.

This pertains, however, only to the condition of the gods after Ragnarok, but what idea did the ancient Scandinavians have of the future life of man? They had two heavens and two hells for humanity, a heaven and hell before

Ragnarok and a heaven and hell after Ragnarok, the hell before Ragnarok corresponding somewhat to the doctrine of purgatory in the Roman Church. Before Ragnarok, those fallen by the sword or in battle went to Valhal to become einherjes who took part with Odin in the final conflict on the plain of Vigrid. Those who died a straw-death, that is to say, who did not fall in combat, went after death to the domain of Hel, and though the Edda is silent on the subject, they probably fought on the side of Loke in Ragnarok.

But after the twilight of the gods there is a heaven named Gimle and a hell called Nastrand. Gimle is a hell more radiant than the sun; it is the uppermost realm, and in it the virtuous shall dwell forever and enjoy delights without end. Its description is brief but complete. Nastrand is the place set apart for the wicked. The word means strand of corpses. It is situated far from the sun, in the lowest region of the universe, is a large and terrible cave, the doors of which open only to the north. This cave is built of serpents, wattle together, and the fanged heads of all the serpents turn into the cave, filling it with streams of venom in which perjurers, murderers and adulterers have to wade. The suffering is more terrible than tongue can tell. Bloody hearts hang outside of the breasts of the damned; their faces are died in gore. Strong envenomed serpent-fangs fiercely pierce their hearts; their hands are riveted together with red-hot stones. Their clothes though wrapped in flames are not consumed, and remorseless ravens keep tearing their eyes from their heads. From this terrible cave the damned are, to increase their anguish, washed by the venomous floods into Hvergelmer, that fearful well in Nifheim, where their souls and bodies are subjected to even more terrible pains and woes; torn by countless clusters of serpents and borne from agony to agony on the whizzing plumage of the primeval Nidhug, the dragon of the uttermost darkness. The old Scandinavians did not believe in eternal punishment. There are passages in the Elder Edda that point to a final reconciliation between light and darkness, Balder and Hoder, between good and evil. There comes a mighty one to the great judgment and makes the dragon Nidhug sink. The vala or prophetess in her last vision in Voluspa points to a time when all that is evil shall be dissolved and washed away by the eternal streams of goodness. This is the last vision of the vala:

"There comes the dark
Dragon flying,
The shining serpent
From the Nida mountains
In the deep.
Over the plains he flies:
Dead bodies he drags
In his whizzing plumage.
Now must Nidhug sink."

There is an intermediate state, a transition, a purification, a purgatory in Hel's domain, and this object must sooner or later be accomplished, and the day of the great judgment when *Nidhug must sink* and never more lift his wings loaded with suffering humanity, must come. The same idea is elaborated in Zendavesta. The Edda has it condensed in a single line, and does not Biblical theology tell us how great joy there is in heaven over a converted sinner? The Scandinavian like the Christian God is a god of mercy who does not desire the eternal ruin of a single sinner but that he shall repent and live, and he is a god of omnipotence, who is able to press the tears of repentance from the heart though it be hard as adamant. He can dissolve all darkness and gild the world with the shining light of heaven. The Scandinavian mythology teaches us that an eternal reward is certain, and the view in regard to punishment as *not* being eternal is maintained by Scandinavia's great mythological student, the late learned N. M. Petersen.

And now a few words in partial recapitulation of the preceding pages.

1. There is a pre-chaotic world, in the south part of which, Muspelheim, Surt (the swarthy, dark, unknown) reigns with flaming sword, and in the north part of which, Niflheim, issues forth the vemon-rivers, the Elivogs, indicating that Nidhug, the dragon in Hvergelmer, is co-eternal with Surt; that is the good and the evil existing from everlasting.

2 Chaotic Ymer is produced by the blending of cold and heat, fire and venom, sent forth into Ginungagap by Surt and Nidhug. Odin and the gods are the beneficent forces and elements in nature. They separate themselves from the giants which are the evil and destructive elements and conquer them by their divine power.

3. Then comes Cosmos. Odin, Vile, and Ve create the present world from the body of the slain Ymer.

4. The government of the world is in the power of the Asgard gods, while they are more or less subjected to the decree of the mighty norns, the weird sisters, dispensers of time and fate. All that is good, beautiful and true comes from the gods, but the giants also manifest their power in all the evil, disturbing and destructive elements of Nature. The gods circumscribe, but do not destroy the power of the giants. The world-life is a ceaseless struggle between these opposite forces. The gods strive to defend what advantage they have, but the giants are continually seeking to defeat them and bring ruin upon them. The gods frequently employ the giants to elevate and fortify themselves, but this is a mistake on their part and they thereby only in the end weaken their own power. The cunning giant-god Loke, the devil or Mephistophiles of Scandinavian paganism whom the gods have adopted and taken into Asgard, deceives and destroys them. The power of the giants keeps increasing and grows more and more threatening to the gods and to the whole world.

5. In harmony with the doctrine of some Christian churches that wickedness is to increase until the last trumpet sounds, so in the Scandinavian religion the world grows worse and worse. It finally comes first to the death of Balder and then to the great struggle in Ragnarok, where both parties summon all their strength for a decisive battle, and where gods and giants mutually slay each other. In this internecine feud the world and the noble ash Ygdrasil are consumed with flames hurled by the mysterious Surt, that is, by the same original power whence came the first sparks of life in the pre-chaotic world.

6. The world is destroyed only to rise again in a more glorious condition. In the reconstruction and regeneration of the world the victory of the gods over the giants is complete. After Ragnarok, Odin, Thor, Frey, etc., are no more as individual divinities, but they are all united in that supreme being, that one who is greater than Odin, that one whom Hyndla's lay in the Elder Edda dare not name, and whom few look far enough to see—that god who is dimly discerned in the primeval beginning, who remains victorious in Ragnarok, and who is from everlasting to everlasting. When that mighty one comes to the great judgment, then the cursed Nidhug, the gnawer in the dark, who has so long tormented the souls of the wicked, sinks, together with death and all pain and evil, into the unfathomable abyss never to rise again. Such was in brief the religion that fostered the enterprising spirit of the grand viking age in the North. It is not unworthy of a modest place beside the other systems of heathen religion. It certainly inspired the ancient Scandinavians to live an upright and brave life. It has many "broken lights" of Christianity in it. The similarity in many parts only makes us wonder how it grew. Anyhow it saves us from having a low idea of the character of our rude ancestors.

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